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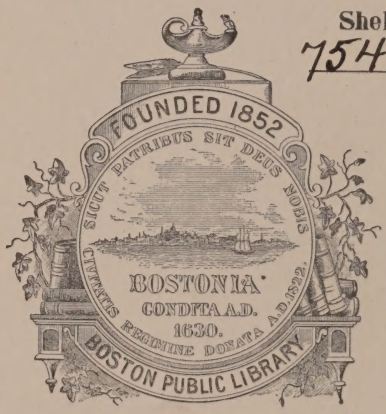

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LETTER

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM E. CHANNING

TO THE

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STANDING COMMITTEE

OF THE

PROPRIETORS OF THE MEETING-HOUSE IN FEDERAL STREET,

IN THE TOWN OF BOSTON,

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, MAY 6, 1840;

AND THE

REPLY OF THE PROPRIETORS THERETO.

PRINTED FOR THE USE OF THE PROPRIETORS.

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At the annual meeting of the Proprietors of the Meeting-house in Federal Street, in the town of Boston, on the sixth day of May, 1840, a communication was read, which had been addressed by Rev. Dr. Channing to the Standing Committee of the Proprietors. Upon hearing the letter, the Proprietors voted to refer it to a Committee, with instructions to report at a future meeting. The following gentlemen composed that Committee: Messrs. John Davis, T. H. Perkins, John Welles, Henry Chapman, Jonathan Phillips, James Savage, and George Ticknor.

At an adjourned meeting, held on the 21st day of May, the Committee presented the following

REPORT.

Boston, May 27, 1840.

"The Committee appointed by the Proprietors of Berry Street Church, at their meeting on the sixth inst., to consider and report on a Letter, of the first inst., from Rev. William Ellery Channing, D. D., their Senior Pastor, communicated by the Standing Committee, to whom it was addressed, having attended to the duties of their appointment, and deliberately and solicitously contemplated the interesting subject which it embraces, ask leave respectfully to offer their unanimous result, in the form of a Letter to the Rev. Dr. Channing, which they would recommend to be adopted by the Proprietors, and by the whole Society. The Reply thus recommended is, if approved and accepted, to be authenticated and transmitted in such manner as the meeting may direct.

(*Signed*) JOHN DAVIS,
T. H. PERKINS,
JOHN WELLES,
HENRY CHAPMAN,
JAMES SAVAGE,
GEORGE TICKNOR,
} *Committee.*

"Hon. Jonathan Phillips, one of the Committee had left Boston on his way to Europe before any action of the Committee on the subject referred to them; but his associates have entire confidence that he would, if present, entirely concur in the above Report."

The Letter, reported by the Committee, was unanimously adopted by the Proprietors, and directed to be transmitted to the Rev. Dr. Channing, as their reply to his communication, verified by the signatures of the Chairman of the meeting, Samuel Greele, Esq., and the Clerk of the Proprietors. They also directed the Letter of Dr. Channing, the Reply of the Proprietors, and the Report of the Committee to be printed for their use, under the direction of a Committee, consisting of the members of the former Committee, the Chairman of the meeting, and the Clerk of the Proprietors.

G. S. H.

Boston, June, 1840.

LETTER

TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE PROPRIETORS OF THE CHURCH IN FEDERAL STREET.

Boston, May 1, 1840.

GENTLEMEN,

This day being the beginning of our parochial year, I think it a fit season for a communication, which I have for some time intended to make. I have, as you may recollect, proposed more than once to relinquish my salary, but have as often been requested by the Society to retain it. The last request was communicated to me by the Hon. J. Davis and the Hon. J. Welles, with a kindness which I shall always remember with gratitude. I observed to them, that one reason for relinquishing the salary was, that, by receiving it, I should excite expectations, which I might not be able to fulfil. But I was assured, that I was to consider myself as wholly free, and to preach only when it might be convenient. I have never lost the hope of being strengthened for greater public labors; but as yet it has not been realized. Under this experience I have gradually reduced my

salary, and have resolved definitely to relinquish it from this day. It is also my wish and purpose, that all my public functions should cease. I do not desire, however, that a formal dissolution of our connexion should take place. Having sustained the relation of pastor nearly forty years, it will be gratifying to me that it should continue, whilst circumstances remain as they are. I wish that the members of the Society may feel that they have a right to seek friendly and spiritual counsels from me, when in need of such, and that I may have a right to communicate with them, when I can hope to do them good. I beg, however, that it may be understood, that the prosperity of the Society is far dearer to me than any personal gratification of this nature; and if it should be thought best, that there should be a formal dissolution of the relation, I desire that this may immediately take place.

In thus bringing my public labors among you to an end, I cannot but acknowledge with gratitude that kind Providence, which has sustained me so many years amidst much physical infirmity, and which has made it the employment of my life to study and teach the religion of Jesus Christ. After a long experience, I feel that life could not have been devoted to a more worthy end. My

time has been given chiefly to the work of acquiring juster, clearer, more quickening views of truth and duty. In this pursuit I have spent my strength, and cheerfully surrendered most of what are called the pleasures of life. That in so doing I have obeyed a divine impulse, I believe; but I may have followed it too exclusively. The inquiries and contemplations, which belong to my profession, may have encroached on its more active duties. My studies, which would have been light to a man of ordinary strength, have produced almost daily an exhaustion, which has left me little spirit for social intercourse. It might have been better for myself and for others, had I more frequently torn my mind from the subjects, which have absorbed almost my whole intellectual energy. For this error, if such it be, I ask and hope a lenient judgment, because I have not given myself to intellectual indulgence, but have carried into my seclusion a sincere, and I hope a growing interest in my fellow-creatures, and in the Christian cause. Other and more serious deficiencies I might recall. Indeed no one can feel, more than I do, the imperfections of my ministry. For these I desire forgiveness of God and man. Still I do not feel as if I had labored in vain. My public services have been listened to with

interest, and I have had proofs, for which I am most grateful, that deeper effects than transient interest have been produced by my ministry. Not that I have accomplished what I wished. As a people, I fear, we are greatly wanting in that spiritual elevation, that superiority to the world, that love of God, of Jesus Christ, and of mankind, which is the end of religious institutions. In truth, all our churches need a new life, a new comprehension of the spirit and high purpose of Christianity. This I say for the truth's sake, and in sorrow of heart, and not from any wounded feelings under the consciousness of having exerted no greater influence. As far as I am personally concerned, I have nothing to complain of, no reproaches to utter. I have received for many years expressions of kindness, for which I offer my sincere thanks. It is indeed a gratifying consideration, that our long union has not been disturbed even by a word of contention. I am not aware that a thought or emotion of unkindness has risen within me towards one of my parishioners. Were I now to leave them, I could from the heart bid an affectionate farewell to *all*.

I have spoken of the past. It is natural for me at such a moment to cast a look towards the future. It is possible, that some sphere of action,

not now anticipated, may open on me. It is more probable, that my present sphere will be contracted. When I look round me, I see not one of the ministers, who filled the pulpits of this city at my ordination. All have gone to their account; and not a few, settled since, have also passed away. He, who seemed destined to go among the first, survives alone. Can I help applying to myself the language of the apostle, "The time of my departure is at hand"? Nor is the time very distant, when all, to whom I have ministered, will have entered the unknown world. It is my fervent prayer, that we may meet in the temple "not made with hands," and that a holier worship than has united us here may bind us together forever.

I may on another occasion express my feelings more fully to the Society. I earnestly desire, that they may continue to enjoy the labors of their devoted pastor, and that through this and other means of religion, their harmony may be perpetuated, and their spiritual improvement never cease.

With respect and affection,

Your friend,

Wm. E. Channing.

REPLY.

The Proprietors and Congregation of the Church in Berry Street to their Senior Pastor, the Reverend William Ellery Channing, D. D.

Rev. and dear Sir,

We have received from the Standing Committee of the Proprietors the letter you addressed them on the first instant, announcing your purpose, from that day, to relinquish the small remainder of salary, which, at our earnest request, you had, till then, consented to receive from us; and expressing your desire that, without formally dissolving the connexion that has so long and so happily subsisted between us, your public functions, as a minister of Christ to this Society, may cease.

We do not wish to conceal from you, that we receive this decision with regret and pain. Perhaps we feel it the more sensibly, because it seemed to be our duty to acquiesce in it, and thus make it final. For several years we have known that

you considered such a separation, as you now propose, desirable on account of the state of your health, and if we have heretofore been unwilling to give it our concurrence, it has been from feelings of respect and attachment to yourself, that have grown old in many of our hearts, and sunk deep in all of them. We may, from these feelings, have resisted your wishes longer than we ought to have done, but we hope and trust we have not been unreasonable; and now that the time has arrived, when we are not permitted to hesitate in giving to them our full assent, it gratifies us, that you do not seek to make the separation absolute and entire, but that you are desirous on your part, as we are on ours, to retain some of the bonds that have united us during a connexion, that has been permitted to be so happy and to last so long.

You allude to the possibility, that some inconvenience may hereafter arise to us from the continuance of these bonds. We anticipate none. We can imagine nothing but good from their continuance. Still if, in the course of Providence, any inconvenience should be felt, we shall, in the spirit of frankness, with which you have spoken of our union and its motives, avail ourselves of your permission to dissolve it, trusting, that, with

the same frankness, you would claim the right you grant; and if it should at any time seem important or desirable to you to exercise it, that you would do so, and separate yourself from us wholly. We do not, however, suppose it at all likely that either party will take a step, which we are sure neither would take but with great reluctance and from a strong sense of duty; and we allude to its possibility, only because you have done so, and because we think it important that both should feel perfectly free to act in circumstances that cannot be foreseen.

Our connexion, as you intimate, has been continued through a longer period, than could at first have been anticipated, — a period indeed so long, that few remain among us, who bore witness to its beginning. You came to us thirty-seven years ago, when our numbers were so few and our circumstances so humble, that it was apparent you came only from a sense of duty, and from a disinterested desire to serve your fellow-men. Under your care, however, we soon prospered and grew numerous. But, at every step of our progress, we felt that, under God's good Providence, we owed it chiefly to you. We have, too, as we trust, been thankful for the ministrations we have enjoyed. We have certainly felt them to be a privilege — a great

privilege — and we have greatly valued them. Nor has their influence been confined to ourselves. They have been felt and acknowledged beyond the limits of our own Society, beyond the limits of our own country; and we trust that even yet neither their work nor yours is wholly accomplished. We trust, that, long after both you and we are gone to render up our last account, your spirit, in the record of what you have here spoken, will be still active in the great cause of Christ and of human improvement, to which you have devoted your life. The only regret we feel, when looking back upon the period of your connexion with us, is, that we have not profited, as we ought to have done, by the privileges we have enjoyed; that we have not become spiritual, and superior to the world; devoted to duty, as you have labored to make us. We pray God to forgive us for our deficiencies, and to make your teachings more effectual to the generations that are to come after us, than they have been to us and to our own.

We feel gratified by the suggestion, that your public labors may not wholly cease; and that you may not only speak again to us, but that it is possible you may become active in some other sphere of usefulness. Amidst whatever circumstances the

course of God's Providence may place you, we doubt not that your influence will be elevating and improving; and that we shall always witness and share its effects with thankfulness, seeking such personal and more immediate intercourse with you, as our relative positions may permit and authorize, and looking to you, at all times, as to a Christian Pastor and spiritual friend.

It is, we know, a satisfaction to you, as it is to us, that you do not leave us alone, but that we remain under the ministrations of the able and devoted Pastor, who has been so long associated with you. We pray, for your sake, as well as for our own, that his health may be fully restored; and that his services, such as you have yourself been accustomed to witness and share them, may be yet many years continued to us and to our children. We can desire nothing better than such fidelity and devotedness as his, except a corresponding faithfulness on our own part to improve by them.

In conclusion, we would invoke on you the blessings you have so often besought for us, adding, for the sake of the cause of Christianity and human improvement, our prayers that your strength and health may be increased, and that

your faculties may be preserved unimpaired to a remote and happy old age.

On behalf of the Proprietors and the Congregation of Berry Street Church.

SAMUEL GREELE, *Chairman.*

GEORGE S. HILLARD, *Proprietors' Clerk.*